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Poland as Seen by Americans 1785—1795

Obraz Polski w oczach Amerykanów w latach 1785—1795

Образ Польши в глазах американцев в 1785—1795 гг.

It might appear that the image of Poland in American consciousness at the end of the eighteenth century was largely formed under the influence of two men: Casimir Pulaski and Thaddeus Kosciusko, whose names came to be included in the eminent group of the heroes of American revolutionary war. Born within two or three years of each other, both sacrificed everything to fight for Poland's independence and when they landed in America both fought bravely in George Washington's army to free the colonies from the English rule. Today the names of the two men have become legendary; they are given to squares, streets, schools. Monuments are erected to them, their memory is celebrated and the two heroes of the American revolutionary war are often mentioned together, their names joined in book titles or in solemn declarations, their faces appearing together on commemorative medals. Only conscientious scholars are aware that — though the deeds of both were inspired by great patriotism and an ardent desire to free Poland from the influence of the neighbouring powers — they were essentially different. They differed in attitudes of mind, evaluation of facts and people, as well as in the ideas that they professed. Contemporary Americans recognized those differences and the names of the two Poles became joined only in the legend which emphasized their love of freedom and their patriotism.

The image of Poland in American consciousness, however, was formed under the influence of other sources and underwent some changes in the course of the decade under discussion.

Casimir Pulaski and his father Joseph belonged to the leaders of the confederacy formed in 1768 in a small town called Bar in the south-eastern province of Poland. Attached to traditional institutions, the confederates of Bar opposed the endeavours of the king to strengthen the power of monarchy and introduce equality of all religious denominations. Above all, however, they fought against the Russian army stationed in Polish territories. "In the ideology of the Bar confederacy conservative, religious, and patriotic motivations were fused so thoroughly that it is difficult to judge what was dominant in it: contrrevolution, religious war or movement for independence." [1]

Pulaski's vision of the ideal political system was that of a democracy of the nobility and gentry, which had come into existence in Poland at the end of the sixteenth century. He believed in the strength of the Republic, resulting from the patriotism of the gentry and the privileged position of the Catholic Church. Pulaski's views were most clearly expressed in 1771 by Rousseau who, at the request of the Bar confederates, wrote *Considérations sur le gouvernement de la Pologne, et sur sa reformation projetée en avril 1772.*[2] Rousseau argued there: "La vertu de ses citoyens, leur zèle patriotique, la forme particulière que des institutions nationales peuvent donner à leurs âmes, voilà le seul rempart toujours prêt à la défendre, et qu'aucune armée ne saurait forcer." [3] Pulaski was convinced that ethical principles of the gentry were the best guarantee of the strength and independence of Poland and he agreed with Rousseau that: Aimant la patrie, ils la serviront par zèle et de tout leur coeur. Avec ce seul sentiment, la législation, fût-elle mauvaise, ferait de bons citoyens; et il n'y a jamais que les bons citoyens qui fassent la force et la prospérité de l'État." [4]

In contrast to Pulaski's vision of Poland based on the traditions of

[1] J. S. Kopczewski: *Kościuszko — Pułaski*, Warszawa 1976, p. 87.

[2] Count M. Wielhorski, a representative of the Confederacy of Bar, requested Mably to prepare a project for reforming the Polish political system. However, when Mably handed in to him the first part of the work, *Du gouvernement et des lois de la Pologne*, he was displeased with it and commissioned Rousseau to write another project, a step that resulted in the writing of *Considérations sur le gouvernement de la Pologne et sur sa réformation projetée.* Though finished in April 1771, this work was first published in 1782, in Rousseau's collected works edited by Du Peyrou. It is noteworthy that John Adams's private library includes, among other works by Mably, also *Du gouvernement et des lois de la Pologne.* Adams was an avid reader of Mably, as can be seen from the numerous comments that he made on the margins of the Frenchman's books.

[3] J. J. Rousseau: *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne, et sur sa réformation projetée en avril 1772*, [in:] *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1801, v. 2, p. 172.

[4] Rousseau: *op. cit.*, s. p. 173.

the gentry, Kosciusko's actions and his vision of the future of Poland were determined by republican ideals. No wonder therefore that the National Legislative Assembly (Assemblée Législative), declaring on 26th August 1792 the brotherhood of all nations, awarded to Kosciusko at the motion of Guadet, a Girondist, the title of "Citizen of France", putting his name on the same list as those of the most illustrious men of that time: Washington, Pestalozzi, Bentham, Priestley and others.

In Pulaski "all the romantic charm of knighthood can be seen" [5], of knights who defended the Republic of the gentry and even dared to abduct the king.[6] Kosciusko, on the other hand, believed in the strength of the whole nation and repeatedly declared that the salvation of Poland depended on the elimination of class privileges which were disrupting the unity of the nation. In March 1794, at the very beginning of the insurrection, when he was trying to transform it into a civil war, he uttered those memorable words: "I will not fight for the gentry alone, I want freedom for all the nation and only for that freedom will I risk my life." [7]

After the fall of the Bar confederacy Pulaski wandered across Germany, France, the Balkans and finally, in early autumn of 1777 he reached America where he soon became a general in Washington's army. Due to his exertions detachments of horse were formed and history accorded to him the name of "father of the American cavalry". Mortally wounded in the battle of Savannah on 9th October 1779, he died two days later without recovering consciousness. Earlier, on his arrival in America — as if he had a premonition of his fate — he had written in his first letter

[5] This was the phrase that President William Taft used when unveiling Pulaski's monument in Washington in 1910. In the course of two centuries of American history Pulaski has doubtless won greater popularity in the United States than Kosciusko, perhaps because his courage, shown in such a spectacular manner in the battlefield, and his heroic death, have appealed to popular imagination far more strongly than Kosciusko's achievement in military engineering. Cf. A. Brożek: *Polonia amerykańska 1854—1939*, [*Poles in America 1854—1939*], Warszawa 1977, p. 12.

[6] In the autumn of 1771 Pulaski participated in an unsuccessful attempt to abduct King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski for which he was tried and sentenced to death in his absence. This episode met with disapproval also in America. John Adams, who was later to become President of the United States, condemned the attempt of the members of the Confederacy to abduct the king and wrote about the incident: "Count Pulaski, who was killed in the service of the United States, is said to have planned an enterprize so much to his dishonour. No good cause ever was, or ever will be, served by assassination; and this is happily, in the present age, the universal sense of mankind." See J. Adams: *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, London 1787, vol. 1, p. 83.

[7] Kopczewski: *op. cit.*, p. 174.

to Washington: "I have come here where freedom is being defended, to serve her, to live or to die for her." [8]

Pulaski had begun the soldier's career in his early youth. When he was already fighting Thaddeus Kosciusko studied first in the Knights' School, which at that time was the centre for enlightened ideas in Poland, and later in France where he increased his knowledge of military constructions. Personal misfortunes and the lack of the right kind of occupation were the cause of Kosciusko's arrival in America in the summer of 1776. In Washington's army he became famous as an outstanding expert on military fortifications. When he was leaving the army he received the general's rank and the highest military distinctions. He came back from America with a firm belief that a weaker nation can triumph over a stronger opponent. He had also gained experience in a fight for independence. He never concealed his sympathies for the American revolution; what is more, he modelled the military organization of the insurrection on Washington's army.[9] The act announcing the insurrection, issued on 24th 1794, bears a close resemblance both in its form and contents to the American Declaration of Independence. [10]

By a strange coincidence almost exactly on the fifteenth anniversary of Pulaski's death, on 10th October 1794, wounded in the battle of Maciejowice, Kosciusko fell prisoner to the Russians. Five weeks later his insurrection was crushed and the name of Poland struck off the map of Europe.

* * *

Since 1791 the American press had frequently and sympathetically informed the public about events in Poland and this attitude remained practically unchanged until 1795, i.e. the year when Poland lost her independence. Hence the following questions may arise: How did Americans view Poland before 1791? Were they at all interested in this declin-

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[9] District generals were nominated in all the provinces after the manner of major generals in every State of the American Union during the revolutionary war. Kosciusko also followed the American model forming — instead of committees — departments of war and treasury which corresponded to the American Board of War and Board of Treasure.

[10] The introduction to this act contains a list of injuries inflicted on Poland by the "greedy despots" — her neighbours. This is followed by an address to all nations who cherish their liberty and are ready for any sacrifice necessary to preserve it. Finally comes the passage which says that the aims of the insurrection are: "driving away foreign armies, recovery of Poland's former territories and preserving them in peace, elimination of all violence, whether foreign or domestic, consolidating national liberty and the independence of the Republic". Cf. T. Kościuszko: *Bibliografia z dokumentów wysnuta*, [in:] *Album Muzeum Narodowego w Rapperswilu*, [*Bibliograpy of documents*, (in:) *Album of the National Museum in Rappersville*], Kraków 1894, vol. 4, pp. 297—298.

ing state in Eastern Europe? And if so, who and for what reasons formed their opinion about Poland? It is obvious that in the years before the Colonial War, and especially during the struggle for independence, American public opinion was not much interested in Polish affairs. This situation changed when the liberated colonies began drafting a constitution for the new state. Then, during the discussion of the political system to be adopted, references were made to Poland and the country mostly served as a warning against disastrous effects of deformed and malfunctioning institutions.

Crucial changes introduced in Poland in the last quarter of the eighteenth century in intellectual attitudes, culture and the educational system resulted in passing a new constitution — the Constitution of 3rd May, 1791. At that point American opinions about Poland changed completely. When we discuss the American image of Poland we concentrate chiefly on the decade 1785—1795, where two phases can be clearly distinguished: the first, when a relatively small group of people — the makers of the constitution of the United States — were interested in Polish institutions, and the second, when the conviction became widespread in American social consciousness that Poland, like France and the United States, was a country of revolutionary changes.

The Americans, who were constructing the political system of their new state, shared the image of Poland with such West European states as France and England. It should be added that in contemporary Europe the decline of Poland, worsening since the beginning of the eighteenth century, was a matter of interest both for politicians and intellectuals. For politicians the fall of Poland meant disturbing both the balance of power in Europe and the relations between the weaker and the stronger states. The eighteenth century saw the breakdown of such states as Spain, Sweden, Poland, Turkey and the simultaneous growth of the power of Russia and Prussia. [11] On the other hand, the historiosophy of the Enlightenment, interested in the causes of the growth and fall of ancient Rome, found its theses clearly demonstrated in the history of Poland. [12]

[11] The correspondence of a Swiss historian, Johannes Müller, from 1772—1774 shows with what alarm was viewed the policy of the great powers who wanted to disrupt the balance of power in Europe. Cf. P. Staufer: *Idee des europäischen Gleichgewichts in politischen Denken J. von Müller*, Basel 1960.

[12] An analysis of the mechanics of growth and decline of states can be found in particular in such works as: Ch. L. de Montesquieu: *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, Paris 1734; A. Ferguson: *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, London 1767 or *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, London 1783; E. Gibbon: *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1776—88, vol. 6.

The works of Montesquieu, Ferguson or Gibbon, translated into various languages, expressed the idea of the Enlightenment that the natural order as the basis of political structure guarantees social equilibrium, justice and free development of the individual. The decline of Poland was therefore a proof that the natural order had been disturbed. Degenerated institutions and an anachronistic social structure were the primary causes of the increasing crisis of the Polish state.

The only exception here was the view of Rousseau who, probably in order to raise the spirits of the Bar confederates, perceived positive qualities of the Polish republic of the gentry in the moral values of the estate and in its traditional institutions. [13] Such apology of the democracy of the gentry and its traditional institutions could only meet with a negative response of the enlightened circles, as — according to M. H. Serejski — the tribunal of history was delivering judgement on Poland for multiple transgressions. [14] For the thinkers of the Enlightenment Poland was an example of an anachronistic political system, called gothic or feudal. These terms meant a weak central government, political disunity, dominance of the Catholic Church, the rule of a single privileged estate, discrimination against townspeople and the serfdom of the peasants. This picture was formed chiefly under the influence of French writers. Beginning with Montesquieu, through Voltaire, the Rev. Gabriel Coyer and finally, due to Louis Jaucourt's article about Poland, published in Diderot's *Great French Encyclopedia*, such opinion about Poland became firmly established.

Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws* called the political structure of Poland the most degenerated aristocracy. [15]

Voltaire, who was an advocate of the enlightened absolutism, could not admire a country where there existed: despotism of the magnates and anarchy of the gentry, privileges of the Catholic Church in spite of proclaimed religious tolerance, a republican state structure and a monarch on the throne, luxury of the aristocracy and poverty of the towns and serfdom of the peasants. The contradictions of feudal Poland

[13] It should be admitted that Rousseau did not unreservedly admire the social structure of eighteenth-century Poland as he did make a remark on the Polish society in which there were "les nobles, qui sont tout; les bourgeois, qui ne sont rien; et les paysans, qui sont moins que rien [...] et l'état de faiblesse où une si grande nation se trouve réduite est l'ouvrage de cette barbarie féodale qui fait retrancher du corps de l'état sa partie la plus nombreuse, et quelque sois la plus saine". Rousseau: *op. cit.*, pp. 188—190.

[14] M. H. Serejski: *Europa a rozbiory Polski*, [*Europe and the Partitions of Poland*], Warszawa 1970, p. 31.

[15] Ch. L. Montesquieu: *De l'Esprit des lois*, Paris 1803, Livre II, Chap. III, p. 88.

were used by Voltaire to demonstrate her stagnation standing in contrast to the development of other countries in north-eastern Europe, and in particular of Russia under Peter the Great. [16]

However, the opinion about Poland prevalent in the epoch of Enlightenment was probably affected most by G. Coyer's three-volume work *Histoire de Jean Sobieski,* published in 1761. It was the main source of the above-mentioned article on Poland in the *Great Encyclopedia.* [17] Coyer appreciated the patriotism of the gentry who had kept the state strong in the past. He declared, however, that Poland's political structure had ultimately brought about the internal disintegration of the country and had made it a convenient ground for the political intrigues of its neighbours. In Coyer's opinion Poland was a country of disjunctive contraditions, which he described in these words: "La Pologne, telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui dans le moral et dans le physique, présente des contrastes bien frappants: la Dignité Royale avec le nom de République, des Lois avec l'Anarchie féodale, des traits informes de la République Romaine avec la Barbarie Gothique, l'abondance et la pauvreté." [18]

The ideas that the makers of American constitution had about Poland were formed not only under the influence of French writings. They were affected at least quite as much, and perhaps even more strongly, by English authors, especially by William Coxe with his four-volume work *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark* (London 1784). The English reports from Poland were not at all more optimistic. We know a few English accounts about Poland written during the reign of the last Polish king, Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski (1764—1795). To mention a few of those that have survived: one by an English merchant, Joseph Marshall; another by a high-ranking colonial official, Nathaniel William Wraxall, and a third by the above-mentioned William Coxe, a well-known historian who spent two years in Poland (1778—1780). [19]

[16] F. Voltaire: *Essai sur les moeurs,* Paris 1963, II, p. 742.

[17] J. Fabre: *Stanisław Leszczyński et mouvement philosophique en France au XVIII siècle,* Paris 1963. Coyer's work could also be found in T. Jefferson's library, see E. Millicent Sowerby, comp.: *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson,* vol. 5, Washington 1955—59, vol. 1, p. 109, entry no. 253.

[18] M. L'Abbé Coyer: *Histoire de Jean Sobieski, Roi de Pologne,* Tome premier, *A Amsterdam et se trouve a Leipsig, chez Maurice George Weidmann,* 1761, p. 66.

[19] J. Marshall: *Travels through Holland, Flanders, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Lapland, Russia, the Ukraine, and Poland, in the years 1768, 1769 and 1770,* London 1772, vol. III; N. W. Wraxall: *Memoirs of the courts of Berlin, Dresden, Warsaw and Vienna, in the years 1777, 1778, and 1779,* 2nd ed., London 1800; W. Coxe: *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark. Interspersed with Historical Relations and Political Inquiries,* Dublin 1784.

A discriminating observer of social relationships, Coxe fully realized that the famed freedom of the gentry had nothing in common with the idea of liberty current in the epoch of the Enligthenment. It was his understanding of the country that made him describe it in such sad words:

"The present situation of the Polish nation impressed my mind with the most pathetic ideas of fallen greatness; and I could not consider, without a mixture of regret and sympathy, a people who formerly gave law to the North, reduced to so low a state of insignificance and domestic misery. The nation has few manufactures, scarcely any commerce; a king almost without authority; the nobles in a state of uncontrolled anarchy; the peasants groaning under a yoke of feudal despotism far worse than the tyranny of an absolute monarch. I never before observed such an inequality of fortune, such sudden transition from extreme riches to extreme poverty; wherever I turned my eyes, luxury and wretchedness were constant neighbours. In a word, the boasted Polish liberty is not enjoyed in the smallest degree by the bulk of the people, but is confined among the nobles or gentry". [20]

Coxe's relation about his travels in Poland, Russia and other northern countries enjoyed great popularity; it went through five editions in England and three in France. It was also translated into German, Dutch and Swedish. For eighteenth-century Europe the book was doubtless one of the main sources of information about Poland. It was also widely popular with the Americans. It has been established that its second London edition of 1785 was accessible in America [21] and there is direct evidence that it was read there. John Adams used Coxe's book largely as a basis for his reflections about Poland in his work *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America.* [22] Besides, the first American edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* openly cites long excerpts from Coxe's work in its article on Poland. [23] Thus it is hardly surprising that at the time of discussing the constitution the ideas of the Americans were in accordance with the current stereotype of Poland.

[20] W. Coxe: *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 146.

[21] This also applies to the work by J. Marshall. Both books are found in the library of John Adams, preserved at present in the Boston Public Library. In the period discussed here both books were also in possession of the library of Harvard University, see *Catalogus Bibliothecae Harvardianae Cantabrigiae Nov-Anglorum*, Bostoniae 1790.

[22] Cf. J. Adams: *A Defence...*, p. 74 and ff.

[23] *Encyclopaedia; or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and Miscellaneous Literature*, vol. XV, Philadelphia 1798.

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As was mentioned before, Poland's political system was referred to when the constitution was being discussed at the Constitutional Convention. The peculiar character of the Polish political institutions and their evident inferiority to their European counterparts suggested that they were the source of national misfortunes and the weakness of the state. Several years before the discussion of the constitution the colonies may have considered the possibility of an alliance with Poland. Such conclusion is not ungrounded because John Adams, who was staying in France as a representative of the Continental Congress, which was in effect the national government of the thirteen colonies, firmly opposed in his report of 4th August 1779 any alliance with Poland pointing out in support of his attitude the country's political and economic weakness. The relevant passage in his report reads as follows: "Poland, depopulated by the war and a vicious government, reduced by a shameful treaty to two-thirds of her ancient dominion, destitute of industry and manufactures, even of the first necessity, has no occasion for the productions of America. Dantzic sees her ancient prosperity diminish every day. There is, therefore, little probability of commerce, and less of any political connection between that nation and us". [24]

Indeed, Poland could hardly be of interest to Americans as a trading partner because she had not a strong international position, and she was weak both politically and economically. Moreover, Prussia, aiming at the appropriation of Danzig, interfered with Poland's international commerce which was done through that port. [25]

A fuller but an equally unengaging picture of Poland was presented by Adams in connection with a discussion of the political system of the United States. Staying in London at the time as a representative of the States he published there in 1787 a three-volume work, *History of the Principal Republics of the World. A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America.* Written in the form of letters this work discussed the republican systems of various countries in order to justify the division of power and to support the conception of the two-chamber parliament. The first volume of Adams's work reached America when the constitutional debate was beginning and at once gained recognition and fame. Two letters (XXI and XXII) contained in that volume and devoted to Poland were the first accounts by an American

[24] C. F. Adams: *The Works of John Adams*, Boston 1850—56, vol. VII, p. 108.

[25] M. Haiman: *Poland and the American Revolutionary War*, Chicago 1932, p. 1.

about the country.[26] Adams repeated the stock notions of eighteenth century Europe about Poland. In the earlier of the two letters he spoke about the disastrous consequences of the country's imbalance of power; with the nobility in the dominant position, with a weak monarch and without a third mediating force representing the people. In the next letter Adams seemed to indicate the effects of the deformation of the political system through which a once powerful and internationally important country fell into ruin when all its power was concentrated in the hands of the nobility. Thus this imbalance was the source of all evil. As Adams put it: "The present wretched state of the towns, compared with their former flourishing condition; the poverty of the peasants, whose oppressions have increased in proportion to the power of the nobles, having lost a protector when the king lost his weight in the constitution; the total confusion in all public affairs; the declension of importance and loss of territory; — all show that absolute monarchy is preferable to such a republic [...]. Would twelve millions of inhabitants, under an English constitution, or under the constitution of any one of the United States, have been partitioned and dismembered? No; not by a league of all the absolute sovereigns of Europe against them at once. Such are the effects of collecting all authority into one center of neglecting an equilibrium of powers and of not having three branches in the legislature".[27] Offering his brilliant comparison between the United States and Poland Adams failed to see that the greatest ally of the Americans in their struggle for independence and for the consolidation of their state was the Atlantic separating the former colonies from their European enemies.

Adams's condemnation of the Polish political institutions was echoed in an article published in 1788 by A. Hamilton and J. Madison, according to whom the partitions of Poland had resulted from the feudal structure of the country in which the central power was weak and the local magnates strong. They argued that because of her obsolete institutions Poland was "equally unfit for self-government and self-defence". Explaining the country's situation they wrote: "It has long been at the mercy

[26] Writing the passage dealing with Poland, Adams cited in letter XXI the opinions of Abbe Pierre Francois Guyot Desfontaines who published in Amsterdam in 1736 two works about Poland (*Histoire de révolutions de Pologne depuis le commencement de cette monarchie jusqu'à la mort d'August II and Histoire de révolutions de Pologne depuis le commencement de cette monarchie jusqu'à la dernière élection de Stanislas Leszczyński*). In letter XXII Adams drew his information from the above-mentioned work by Coxe and also cited long excerpts from *Oeuvres du philosophe bienfaisant* by Stanislaw Leszczyński, published in Paris in 1763—4. Cf. A d a m s: *A Defence...*, pp. 74 and 88.

[27] A d a m s: *A Defence...*, pp. 81—82.

of its powerful neighbours; who have lately had the mercy to disburden it of one third of its people and territories". [28]

Although generally criticized for her political system Poland was often referred to on account of her institutions, especially when the presidential term in office was being discussed. The interest in this problem was not dictated by intellectual curiosity alone but prompted by the long-lasting fear that European powers might try to influence the election of the head of state in America as they had previously done in Poland.

In his speech delivered at the Constitutional Convention on 25th July 1787 Madison said in plain words: "Limited as the powers of the executive are, it will be an object of great moment with great rival powers of Europe, who have American possessions, to have at the head of our government a man attached to their respective politics and interests. No pains, nor perhaps expense, will be spared, to gain from the legislature an appointment favorable to their wishes [...]. In the latter, [Poland] although the elective magistrate has very little real power, his election has at all times produced the most eager interference of foreign princes and has in fact at length slid entirely into foreign hands". [29]

Like Jefferson, Madison was convinced that the influence of foreign powers on the election of a president could be eliminated if his term in office was limited to a short period after which another man would take over. In his letter from Paris addressed to Madison and dated 20th December 1787 Jefferson wrote among others: "The election of a President of America, some years hence, will be much more interesting to certain nations of Europe, than ever the election of a King of Poland was [...]. No foreign power, nor domestic party will waste their blood and money to elect a person, who must go out at the end of a short period. The power of removing every fourth year by the vote of the people, is a power which they will not exercise [...]". [30]

The same reasoning was adopted by George Mason who, citing the example of Poland, said at the state convention in Virginia that the absence of rotation in presidential office could cause the intervention of European powers in American affairs. [31]

It is significant that Alexander Hamilton speaking at the Constitution-

[28] Henry Cabot Lodge: *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, New York 1885, vol. IX, p. 113.

[29] J. Elliot: *The Debates in the Several States Conventions on the Adopting of the Federal Constitution*, vols. 1—5, Washington D.C. 1836—1845, vol. 1, p. 422, vol. 5, p. 364.

[30] Th. Jefferson: *The writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Andrew A. Lipscomb, editor, Washington D.C. 1903—04, vol. VI, p. 389.

[31] Elliot: *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 484.

al Convention on 18th June 1787 defended the reverse conception and also cited the example of Poland. He thought that the American president, like the Polish king, should be elected for life because, once elected, he would not have to worry about re-election and could devote his time unreservedly to the affairs of state. [32]

Poland was again referred to during the discussion of the problem who was to elect the president: all the voters or the Congress of the United States. [33]

The period during which the Americans judged the Polish political system very harshly closed with a remark made in 1790 by James Wilson, professor of law at the College of Philadelphia. According to him the oft-quoted example of Poland was inappropriate because it was a country of tyranny and slavery. Wilson said: "Poland is composed only of slaves, headed and commanded by a few despots. Those despots have private purposes to serve; and they head their slaves as the instruments for executing those private purposes. In Poland, we search in vain for a people. Need we be surprised, that at an election in Poland, where there are only tyrants and slaves, all the detestable and pernicious extremes of tyranny and slavery should unite". [34]

When Wilson formulated his judgement, in Poland the process of national re-birth and of reform of state was being completed. This news was soon to reach America and was to change radically the American opinion about Poland. The country ceased to be regarded as an example of a decaying political system and became a model of revolutionary society putting in practice the ideals of the Enlightenment.

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In January 1792 the Bostonian newspaper "Columbian Centinel" printed an article entitled *Retrospect of events in 1791.* It informed its readers that: "The year just expired has been pregnant with great and interesting events. In Poland with propriety we may say, that a Nation of Freemen has, in the preceding year, been born in a day [spacing ours — G. L. S. and M. S.]. Therein we have seen, a Revolution in government favourable to the people, planned, promulgated and put into execution by its King". [35] This was

[32] Lodge: *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 374.

[33] Elliot: *op. cit.*, vol. V, pp. 322—323.

[34] *The Works of James Wilson, associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States... being his public discourses upon jurisprudence and the political science, including lectures as professor of law, 1790—2,* ed. by James De Witt Andrews..., Chicago 1896, vol. 1, p. 398.

[35] „Columbian Centinel", January 4, 1792.

a sign that the image of Poland in America changed all of a sudden though the changes in our country had been taking place throughout the reign of the last Polish king Stanislaus Augustus in the years 1764—1795. After the first partition (1772) new tendencies in economic and intellectual life had become especially remarkable. Putting into practice the ideals of Enlightenment the Polish society — or at least its upper strata — made a tremendous effort to transform a backward country, that exotic Sarmatia, situated on the peripheries of the cultural world, into a modern State. Stanislaus Augustus, himself a widely-educated man, initiated and supported the movement for reform. Newspapers and literary magazines began to be published, discussion clubs were founded, a permanent theatre was established in Warsaw in 1765 and Józef Zaluski handed over to the nation his vast library in 1773. The Jesuit schools were replaced by a new and uniform educational system. A new syllabus was introduced together with new textbooks and teachers for these schools were being educated in the spirit of new ideals at two reformed universities: one in Cracow, the other in Vilno. [36]

The new constitution was passed through the Diet as if to crown the series of reforms. A year after the Constitutional Convention of the United States there gathered in Poland in 1788 the Great Parliament which passed the famous Constitution of the 3rd May 1791. The new constitution, the second in the world — after the American — to be formulated in writing, preceded by a few months the revolutionary constitution of France. When the news of the new Polish constitution reached France the French newspapers wrote that Poland "was burning with the same fire of liberty as France and that from the banks of the Vistula the fire would spread west to the Rhine and to the north". [37] On first hearing the news about the new Polish constitution George Washington wrote in a letter dated 20th July 1791 and addressed to David Humphrey who was then diplomatic representative of the United States in Lisbon: "Poland, by the public Papers, appears to have made large and unexpected strides towards Liberty: which, if true, reflect great honor on the present King, who seems to have been the principal Promoter of the business". [38]

[36] G. L. Seidler: *The Reform of the Polish School System in the Era of the Enlightenment*, [in:] *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, CLXVII: 1977, Oxford 1977.

[37] M. Handelsman: *La constitution polonaise du 3 mai 1791 et l'opinion française*, Paris 1910, p. 15 (Offprint from "Revue historique de la révolution française").

[38] F. L. Humphreys: *Life and Times of David Humphreys*, New York 1917, II, p. 125.

The new Polish constitution was passed when Russia was involved in a conflict with Turkey, but when that was settled at the beginning of 1792 the Empress, Catherine II, turned against Poland. The Russian army invaded Polish territories and with the support of the opponents of the constitution re-introduced the old order. The armed opposition of the Polish military forces was called off because the king was convinced that fighting against the Russian army was pointless. He also cherished the illusion that by repudiating the constitution he could still save the country. Meanwhile, having reached an agreement with Prussia, Russia brought about the second partition of Poland in 1793. This act of violation of the rights of Poland caused a national insurrection whose supreme commander and highest moral authority was Thaddeus Kosciusko. After its final defeat suffered on 10th October 1794 the insurrection fell and then Russia, Prussia and Austria began liquidating the Polish state and terminated the affair by signing an alliance in 1795.

* * *

The first news about revolutionary changes in the political system of Poland began to reach America at the time when the country was still enthusiastic about the French revolution.[39] This enthusiasm called the "French frenzy" is easy to understand: France had previously had a political and economic bond with the United States and this was now strengthened by the addition of ideological kinship. In such an atmosphere the news about the Polish revolution — as the Polish political reforms were called — was likewise received with warmth.

As the French Revolution was gradually becoming more and more radical until terror emerged, the American public opinion was no longer uniformly sympathetic. While the Democrats persisted in their admiration for France, the Federalists began to have reservations which soon turned to open criticism. In contrast to this ideas about Poland remained unchanged. The view that the revolution was temperate gained ground. Moreover, in the eyes of the Americans Poland resembled their own recent situation, when they were forgoing their new political system in the face of a constant threat of English intervention.

Public opinion in the United States was almost daily informed about events in Poland though all information reached Americans with a delay

[39] Some Americans had heard earlier about the projected constitution. T. Jefferson probably received a draft of the constitution together with a letter, dated 9th March, from Piattoli who was informing him fairly regularly about the reforms then in preparation in Poland. Cf. J. W. Hoskins: *A Lesson which All Countrymen Should Study. Jefferson Views Poland*, "Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress", vol. 33, 1976, no. 1, p. 38.

of over two months, since such a long time was needed then to sail across the Atlantic. All news first reached Philadelphia, New York and Boston and was later transmitted to inland cities. It was published mostly as letters from Warsaw and sometimes as dispatches from London, Paris or other European capitals.[40]

Thanks to the press the entire American society was aware of the fate of Poland, whereas at the time of the Constitutional Convention the Polish political system had aroused only the interest of the political élite. Sympathy for the Polish revolution was widespread. Toasts for Poland were proposed at every public occasion, pamphlets and literary works inspired by Poland were printed, even Polish fashion became popular.[41]

On the basis of newspaper information we would like to draw a picture of Poland which was fixed in the consciousness of the Americans between 1791 and 1795. We think that some features persistently emphasized by the contemporary press will become salient. They are: the role of the king in the political changes, the attitude of the nobility towards the underprivileged estates and the temperate character of the "Polish Revolution" which was carried out in the majesty of the law.

I. The American press strongly emphasized the role of the king in the Polish revolution regarding him as the initiator and the guardian of social change. In one of the first news items dealing with political changes we read the following: "The King of Poland is not like his brother of France [...] When he was told that it was against his interest to permit the election of a successor to the Crown of Poland, during his own life, he nobly replied, «I love my country better than myself and I am convinced that such a measure is alone calculated to resist the influence of foreign powers over the councils of the nation, and to counteract the evils which such an influence has always produced — there is therefore, no room for hesitation.»" [42].

The American newspapers had a high opinion of the reformatory activity of Stanislaus Augustus especially when they compared the Poland of the 'nineties with the situation that the king had found on his election. During the passing of the bill about the royal cities a letter from Warsaw,

[40] Owing to the study of M. Haiman: *The Fall of Poland in Contemporary American Opinion*, Chicago 1935, we have at our disposal a large selection of newspaper articles about Poland. These materials were complemented by others from the same period obtained in the course of our research in the library of Yale University, Harvard University and the Public Library in Boston.

[41] It is difficult to determine with precision when the actual text of the constitution reached America. It is an established fact, however, that in 1791, the year when it was issued in Poland, its English translation had two editions in London.

[42] "Gazette of the United States" 1791, February 5.

dated 19th April 1791, offered the following account: "Yesterday was a day of triumph to millions, a day that will form a glorious epoch in the annals of this country, and render immortal the name of Stanislaus Augustus, in whom we revere all the qualities of a truly patriotic King [...] but in what state did Stanislaus Augustus find Poland, on his elevation to the throne? Was it not in a state of anarchy and still averse to any reform? Was it not exposed to all disasters, without any means in the King's hands to prevent them? The King felt the cause of so many misfortunes: he knew the defects of government, and was acquainted with the spirit of his nation. With unwearied exertion of his zeal and abilities, by gentle persuasion and example, he not only introduced order into the administration of different departments of the State, but even pre-disposed minds for the most difficult and most glorious reformation, a r e f o r m a t i o n i n t h e s e n t i m e n t s o f t h e n a t i o n a t l a r g e, [spacing ours — G.L.S. and M.S.], a reformation that inspired the i n h a b i t a n t s o f c i t i e s, who for ages past had lived in a kind of slavery [...] with courage to reclaim the enjoyment of their ancient rights." [43]

The Polish king was viewed with equal sympathy in correspondence from London in which his modesty and his wit were praised and the temperate character of the changes in Poland highly commended. "A Revolution which cost only a hat. London, June 4. It will never be forgot in Poland, that on the memorable 3rd of May, the patriotic King Stanislaus Augustus discharged his guards. In the procession from the Senate house to the church, and from the latter place to his own palace, he absolutely refused to have a single man of his usual guards with him, but mixed with the Senators and citizens at large, and frequently was engaged in the crowd. — «Well» said he, at the close of the evening, «thank God, not a single drop of blood has been shed. Perhaps one of the greatest misfortunes that has happened to-day, has lighted upon myself, for I have lost my hat in the crowd.»" [44]

The role played by Stanislaus Augustus in formulating the Constitution of 3rd May was presented in a dispatch from London of 24th March 1791 which eulogized his high intellectual and moral quality. "In the history of mankind there are but very few instances to be found, where kings, unsolicited and unintimidated, have made a voluntary surrender of their power. There are many great sayings of great acts; but we read of none that deserves to be preferred to the late conduct of the King of Poland. The form of the new constitution of Poland, is not merely sanctioned by the King; but dictated, framed and fashioned in the exalted

[43] "Boston Gazette" 1791, July 25.

[44] "Gazette of the United States" 1791, August 17.

superiority of his own mind, affords a new lesson to the world. It shows a King who knows and reverences his own station; not a King of Robes and Scepters, not a King a Diadems and Prerogatives, but a King in Mind, in Principle, a King in wisdom and virtue." [45]

In another long article, *Reflections on the Polish Constitution*, dated 1st July 1791, the king was described as the prime mover of the Polish revolution. "His Polish Majesty, who, in a great measure, was the cause of the late revolution, is enjoying the heart-felt satisfaction of having contributed towards a change that seems to promise the happiest consequences." [46]

Equally enthusiastic was a dispatch from Cork in Ireland which called the king the father of his nation and the man who gave it freedom. It reads as follows: "The King of Poland may justly style himself the Father of his People; the title is not sported with by this illustrious monarch to deceive his children — wise by experience, prudent by example, and enlightened by philosophy, he has taken off the chains of the Poles, and hung them up in the temple of liberty." [47]

The anniversary of the constitution was mentioned in correspondence from London dated 8th June 1792. "The municipality of Warsaw gave a grand dinner in the Palace of Radziwill, on the 3rd of May, to 500 persons. The King of Poland, who was among the company when his health was drank as King, rose and said, 'the period is arrived, in which artificial distinctions cease, except as far as they are conferred by the people, and are acknowledged by those who are honoured with them to be so conferred. «Vive le Municipalité.» Afterwards the King drank «Vive la Nation»; and the Hall resounded with the shouts of «Vive le Roi, Vive le Premier Citoyen, Vive l'Ami des Hommes.» In Poland there prevails a spirit of the greatest ardor and unanimity [...]" [48]

From among the numerous articles concerning the king we have selected those that explicitly speak about the leading role played by him in the revolution which was regarded as a particular characteristic of the Polish movement for change. It should be added that the American press maintained its sympathy for Stanislaus Augustus even when he resigned the crown. In an editorial note the "Columbian Centinel" wrote on 20th May 1795: "S t a n i s l a u s, the mild, but infirm, ex-king of Poland, unequal to the weight of cares which enveloped him, has formally resigned his crown, which to him has been a crown of thorns; and

[45] "Gazette of the United States" 1791, September 7.
[46] "The New York Daily Advertiser" 1791, August 27.
[47] "Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser" 1792, January 24.
[48] "The Newport Mercury" 1792, August 20.

the meretricious K a t h e r i n e has invited him to her dominions, doubtless with the same friendly cordiality that a wolf invites a lamb to her den." [49]

Another description of the king's abdication, published in "Boston Gazette", closed with the statement: "Such was the end of the reign of Stanislaus, than whom a man of brighter virtues, and a more enlightened mind never filled a throne." [50]

II. Another significant feature in the picture of Poland that emerged from the American press accounts was the patriotic attitude of the nobility whose representatives — aware of their duty to the nation — rose to the occasion voluntarily giving up a number of their privileges. It was emphasized that, in contrast to the French Revolution, in which the representatives of the third estate were the active force for change, the change in the Polish political system was carried out by the Parliament composed only of the nobility.

A striking example of this way of thinking is found in a long article, *Washington and Franklin eulogized in the Diet,* published on 20th April 1791 as correspondence from Warsaw. It reads as follows: "When the National Assembly of France reduced the nobility to an equality with the citizens, the greater number of its members consisted of the T i e r s E t a t; but when Poland raised her citizens to that equality the Diet consisted of nobility only. And yet there was no division within doors, nor commotion without [...] Count Malachowski, and Prince Sapieha, Marshals of the Diet, were particularly animated and happy in the arrangement and solidity of their arguments. Prince Adam Czartoryski, Wawrzecki, and Niemcewicz, Member for Livonia, also distinguished themselves in a remarkable manner. «None of us», said this last gentleman, speaking of the exclusion of all such as are not nobles, from offices of trust and honors, «knows who were the ancestors or what was the religion of W a s h i n g t o n and F r a n k l i n; but all of us know what important services these illustrious characters rendered to their country. Let not, therefore, the modesty of citizens prescribe limits of our generosity. Let us not ask, nor look into old papers to ascertain what they have a right to demand; but let us grant them, out of our own free accord, all that the welfare of our own country requires that they should possess.»" [51]

Other news items from Warsaw informed readers that a new order had been introduced there and that the nobility approved of the changes. The article *Euthusiasm reigns in Poland,* published on 23rd April 1791,

[49] "Columbian Centinel" 1795, May 20.

[50] "Boston Gazette" 1795, May 23.

[51] "Boston Gazette" 1791, July 25, "The Newport Mercury" 1791, July 30.

contained the following reflections: "In short, it should seem that this new order of things has annihilated all pride of rank — every one seems eager to despise those unworthy prejudices of Noblesse, which will shortly only be remembered in Poland as traces of former barbarism." [52]

In another article, which appeared on 3rd May, the Warsaw correspondent wrote: "The Union of the Noblesse with the class of citizens meets with daily encouragement. Prince Czartoryski and Count Potocki, Marshal of Lithuania, are become burghers; Count Malachowsky, Marshal of the Diet, has also added himself to the class of citizens, saying at the same time — «that he should think it an honor to be a magistrate of Warsaw.» One of the magnates has declared his intention of opening a warehouse in his palace, to show that it is by no means degrading for a nobleman to be concerned in trade." [53]

A positive evaluation of the Polish changes as compared with the French Revolution is found in correspondence from London dated 9th June 1791. "The revolution in Poland, so temperate, fair, and wise, scarcely provokes the censure of Mr. Burke. Had the French nobility displayed the temper of the Princes of Poland, all would have been well with them at this day; which shows that human, as well as physical nature *obtemperando vincitur*. In France, the noblesse considered every other class of citizens as of an inferior species; and hence the emancipation of that nation from servitude involved in it the annihilation of that order in the state, which had been the hereditary oppressors of mankind for generations. In Poland the nobility, by the dereliction of usurping preeminence, have ingratiated themselves with the people; and the new constitution of Poland seems to be erected on the most solid foundation." [54] (spacing ours — G.L.S. and M.S.).

Another letter from London (30th September 1791), which appeared in several newspapers, maintained that the Polish revolution was fully successful and that the new constitution was already being implemented. "Poland has yet met with no interruption in its happy Revolution; the new wheels, which have been inserted into the machinery of its Constitution have been put in motion, and found to work well and harmoniously with the whole [...] The people at large are certainly much happier circumstanced then they were, and the nobility not less so [spacing ours — G.L.S. and M.S.]. Com-

[52] "Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser" 1791, July 21.

[53] "Gazette of the United States" 1791, July 20.

[54] "Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser" 1791, August 15. Three days later this news item also appeared in "Gazette of the United States".

parative liberty has been given without licentiousness having been encouraged." [55]

The American press stressed the fact that the patriotic makers of the Constitution, themselves members of the nobility, were determined to carry it out even after Stanislaus Augustus repudiated it in 1792 under the pressure of the Russian army. "Many people however, dissented from the general resolution, Malachowzki, Potocke, Sapiheat, Soltik etc. refused to sign the re-confederation. Upwards of 4000 and several others, assembled and calling out, the Constitution without the King! They sought after Malachowzki, Prince Sapiheat, Potocke, and Soltik, and carried them round in public." [56]

III. In its picture of Poland the American press strongly emphasized that laws were obeyed both in the period of political reforms and during the Kosciusko insurrection. Newspapers assured readers that the Polish revolution had nothing in common with Jacobinism and all the principal changes were introduced legally, without arbitrary decisions, mob violence or terror. This opinion of the American press contradicted the statements issued by Russia and Prussia which claimed that their armed intervention was only meant to put down the alleged Polish Jacobinism.

The American press had two distinct conceptions of legality: the rule of law and obedience to constitutional principles. Stressing the evolutionary character of the political reform in Poland, the American correspondents writing from Warsaw informed their readers that after granting rights to townspeople the reformers would in turn free the serfs. Below is an excerpt from an account describing the passage through the Diet of a bill about cities to which the American press gave the name of the Polish revolution: "Upon this occasion, the plan of Mr. Suchorzewski, a member from Kalish was adopted. The substance of the principles which have been decreed agreeable to this project, is «to destroy the difference of orders and classes; to grant liberty to all citizens, without distinction; to restore Nobility to its true origin, that is to the prerogative of merit and virtue: but at the same time to effect these different changes by degrees, and with such precautions as will procure the success of them.» Poland may therefore date her restoration from that day [...] Nothing but the emancipation of our peasants seems now to be wanting, in order to render all ranks as happy as they are brave, and the country as independent and powerful as it is fruitful and rich; but this can only be effected by degrees." [57]

[55] "Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser" 1791, December 8; "National Gazette", Philadelphia 1791, December 8; "Gazette of the United States" 1791, December 10; "The N. Y. Daily Advertiser" 1791, December 12.

[56] "Boston Gazette" 1792, October 1.

A brief note of an American editor dated August 1791 informed newspaper readers that the new Polish constitution had given its sanction to two basic principles. "Two leading principles in the new constitution of Poland are, that a man shall not be imprisoned for debt, unless he has committed a fraud: And the other the full liberty of the press. Without these essentials it is impossible any constitution can be free." [58]

In their own comments newspapers emphasized that the nobility in Poland had carried out a bloodless revolution without disturbing public order. A long article of October 1791 entitled *The State of Poland* contains a passage which reads as follows: "One of the most proud, numerous and fierce bodies of nobility and gentry ever known in the world, arranged only in the foremost rank of free and generous citizens. Nor one man incurred loss, or suffered degradation. All, from the King to the daylabourer, were improved in their condition. Everything was kept in its place and order, but in that place and order every thing was bettered. To add to this happy wonder (this unheard-of conjunction of wisdom and fortune) not one drop of blood was spilled." [59]

The same opinion — that the Polish revolution had been bloodless — was expressed in an editorial commentary of another newspaper. "The Revolution in Poland, exhibits a new and almost unparalleled scene. Its accomplishment without the effusion of blood or the destruction of property, is matter of pleasing reflection." [60]

The American press greeted the Kosciusko insurrection enthusiastically but at the same time insisted that the Polish revolution was different from Jacobinism. Four newspapers published the same article with the significant title *Much important intelligence. Revolution in Poland*, which presented the situation at the beginning of the uprising opening with the following words: "Warsaw, Capital of Poland. April 22. The spiirt of Revolution reigns every where. Gen. Kosciusko has erected the Standard of Liberty and the People." [61]

Two weeks later a letter from Warsaw characterized the Polish revolution in this way: "The Polish Insurrection is an event which must attract the attention of Europe, it is of consequence therefore, to afford the public every possible light upon the subject. The general fear is, that this insurrection, though undertaken to deliver the country from a foreign yoke, may degenerate into an imitation of those cruelties of which France

[57] "Boston Gazette" 1791, July 25; "The Newport Mercury" 1791, August 6.

[58] "The Newport Mercury" 1791, September 3.

[59] "Gazette of the United States" 1791, October 29.

[60] "Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser" 1792, February 2.

[61] "Columbian Centinel" 1794, June 25; "The Newport Mercury" 1794, July 1; "Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser" 1794, July 3.

has become the theatre. Nothing, however, can be more ill grounded than this supposition. All that has been said in the public papers of the executions, and sanguinary sentences that have taken place is entirely false. The National Tribunal established in order to decide upon crimes against the nation, has not yet tried one person. The Cardinal Law of Poland, *neminem captivabimus nisi jure victum*, is respected and strictly adhered to." [62]

The press informed readers that both King Stanislaus Augustus and Thaddeus Kosciusko had firmly repudiated Jacobinism. When the Warsaw Revolutionary Council assured the monarch of their respect for him but insisted that he was in duty bound to obey Kosciusko, the King's reply, as cited by the press, was: "that «he felt grateful for this testimony of their respect and attachment; that no person could have more sincere love for his country than himself; that while he wished their enterprize might issue in producing the happiness of the country, he recommended to them above everything, to respect religion, property, distinction of ranks and the throne — that they would prove in one word their utter detestation of Jacobin maxims [...]»." [63]

The press also reported that when Kosciusko had rejected the demand of the Warsaw delegates for a more radical policy, he had declared that he did not want to follow the Jacobin methods. The account of the incident is as follows: "The deputation of the citizens of Warsaw to Kosciusko have been sent back with the answer, but the demand of the citizens did not harmonize with his plan, as he was not willing to introduce the Jacobin principles into the kingdom; tho' the wishes of the citizens would always command great weight with him." [64]

American newspapers were full of news items about the armed intervention of Poland's powerful neighbours. There are also numerous mentions about the battles fought in 1792 in defense of the Constitution, about the second partition, about the outbreak and then the crushing of the Kosciusko insurrection, finally, about the fall of Poland. It is impossible to cite even the most characteristic opinions. What seems most significant is the friendly tone of these accounts. The intervention of the Russian army which was brought to stamp out the movement for liberty in Poland was thus reported: "Poland — people, nobles, king, with one voice, framed a constitution, founded principally on the unalienable rights of the people, bearing, in many parts, a striking resemblance to our forms of government. But the ambitious Catherine, jealous

[62] "Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser" 1794, July 16.

[63] "The New York Herald" 1794, August 25.

[64] "Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser" 1794, August 28.

of their success, and unwilling to see one link of the despotick chain broken, has opposed power to right, and (sent) her numberless mercenary automatons to (crush) the patriotick band of Polish citizens: Stanislaus is forced to yield; despotism conquers; liberty weeps!". [65]

When the Kosciusko insurrection ended in defeat and its commander was taken prisoner by the Russians the American newspapers wrote in their comments: "The brave but unfortunate Kosciusko, and his Fellow Prisoners, have been dragged to Petersburg, where it is greatly to be feared, that this heroic Champion in the Cause of Liberty will be condemned by the Female Tyrant of the North, to the ignominous and excruciating Punishment of the Knout. The Empress of Russia, in her Anathemas against the unfortunate Poles, calls them Incendiaries, Jacobins, Democrats and Republican Robbers. This is the Language of Tyrants, while they plunder Mankind of their very Birthright!". [66]

* * *

The image of Poland, such as it emerged from the American press, must have suggested to readers some more general conclusions. In their opinion the political reforms carried out in the country had made Poland a modern state, in keeping with the ideals of the Enlightenment. Only the fears of the neighbouring powers that ideas of liberty emanating from Poland could shake the thrones of the tyrants caused the ultimate downfall of the country. It was no longer Poland with her obsolete political system that was brought before the tribunal of history but the partitioning powers which dealt a mortal blow to a country engaged in reforming its political system. The Americans reached a conviction that without foreign armed intervention Poland would have been able to exist and develop normally.

When Poland finally lost her independence the American interest in the country dwindled. This was largely due to the change in the foreign policy of the United States which, under the influence of the Federalists, replaced its former sympathies for republican France by a new turn towards conservative England. In 1799 appeared a short news item, *Poland is no more and soon to be forgotten.* This telling title was completed by the sentence: "Poland is no more. — Its Stanislaus is dead — its nobles scattered abroad: — and that it ever existed, will speedily only be remembered by the Historian, the Geographer, or the Newsmonger". [67]

[65] "Columbian Centinel" 1792, November 7.

[66] "The Newport Mercury" 1795, March 4.

[67] "Columbian Centinel" 1799, November 23.

Fortunately, this forecast was wrong because in a few years' time the Polish cause was again to become one of the main problems of the Napoleonic epic.

STRESZCZENIE

Jest rzeczą zrozumiałą, że w latach poprzedzających wojnę kolonialną oraz w czasie trwających walk wyzwoleńczych opinię amerykańską mało interesowała Polska. Sytuacja zmieniła się, kiedy wyzwolone kolonie przystąpiły do opracowania konstytucji. Wówczas — w związku z dyskusją nad konstytucją — powoływano się na strukturę Polski, aby na przykładzie tego państwa wykazać zgubne następstwa przestarzałych i źle działających instytucji. Ten negatywny obraz zmienił się radykalnie w świadomości Amerykanów, gdy w Polsce uchwalono Konstytucję 3 maja 1791 r. — pierwszą w Europie po konstytucji amerykańskiej. Fakt ten spowodował, że Amerykanie zaczęli traktować Polskę — obok Stanów Zjednoczonych i Francji — jako kraj postępowych przemian ustrojowych.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Совершенно понятно, что в годы, предшествующие колониальной войне, и во время освободительной борьбы американское общественное мнение мало интересовалось Польшей. Положение изменилось, когда бывшие колонии приступили к разработке конституции. Именно тогда — связи с дискуссией над конституцией — ссылались на структуру Польши, чтобы на примере этого государства показать пагубные последствия устаревших и плохо функционирующих институтов. Этот отрицательный образ в сознании американцев радикально изменился после принятия в Польше Коституции 3 мая 1791 г. — первой в Европе после американской конституции. Именно в это время американцы стали считать Польшу, наравне с США и Францией, страной прогрессивных государственных изменений.